

**STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS
OF ONLINE LEARNING PROGRAMMES OF
NATIONAL ONLINE DISTANCE EDUCATION SERVICE**

By

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The Dissertation was submitted to the Department of Computer Science & Engineering of the University of Moratuwa in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

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December 2009

University of Moratuwa



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Abstract

According to the statistics of the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka, every year about 125,000 G.C.E. (A/L) qualified students fall into the category of “higher education opportunity less” due to the simple fact that the conventional university system does not have the capacity. Similarly, there is a large number of professionals scattered around the country who seek higher education opportunities as well as continuing professional development for which no opportunities are found in their respective areas. In addition, most of the employers operating out of Western Province need to train and re-train their employees in various disciplines which also need to be addressed. All these issues constrain opportunities available for continuing education. In this context online learning has been viewed as a way to increase access to higher and continuing education.

Presently, a state-of-the-art network has been established by the National Online Distance Education Service (NODES) in order to facilitate the delivery of online post secondary level programmes developed by the universities and other private and public sector post-secondary educational institutions.

The aim of the study is to find out the perceptions of stakeholders (students, teachers, administrators and experts) on effectiveness of online learning programmes of NODES in Sri Lanka. The study will examine the perceptions of stakeholders drawn from around 17 online programmes of disciplines like Medicine, Information Technology, Accounting, Culinary Arts, Agriculture, Business and Disaster Management, Quantity Surveying, Teacher Education, Library Science. It will also try to find out whether there is a relationship between demographic characteristics of stakeholders like gender, age, marital status, education, employment, income, district and effectiveness of online programs in terms of Accessibility and Quality.

Significance of the study stems from the effort taken to evaluate an initiative taken to address one of the major problems of the country which is to increase access for post secondary education. Also, it would help to improve quality/effectiveness of online distance education programmes to cater to the current demands from the labour market for employees with technical and employable skills.

The research utilized the survey approach and questionnaires were used to collect data from 216 students and 20 tutors/administrators/experts interviewed. Qualitative analysis of interview data and statistical analysis of questionnaire data are presented as the final output of the research.

The findings of this study indicates factors which facilitate and/or obstruct the effective implementation of online programmes to enable feasible strategies for effective implementation to be identified and shared with providers of online learning. Finally, recommendations are made on resolving the identified issues and to extend and improve the effectiveness of online distance education.